

Who Is to Blame?

Grade Level: Grade 5
Content Areas: Social Studies
Time to Complete: Two ninety-minutes sessions
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1. South Carolina Curriculum Standards Addressed (T = Targeted, I = Introduced, R = Reinforced/Reviewed)

- **Social Studies**

II. Power, Authority, and Governance: Government/Political Science

- 5.5 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the foundations of American democracy, including its basic principles and the basis of the American political system.
 - 5.5.1 investigate the ways people can work together to promote the principles and ideals of American democracy (R)
- 5.8 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the role of the citizen in American democracy, including personal and civic rights and responsibilities.
 - 5.8.3 explain how citizens can influence policies and decisions by working with others (R)
 - 5.8.4 formulate personal opinions and communicate them to key decision and policy makers (R)

III. People, Places, and Environments: Geography

- 5.13 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the uses of geography.
 - 5.13.3 analyze ways to make informed decisions regarding social and environmental problems (T)

2. Lesson/Unit Description

This lesson, which lends itself to the possibility of an in-depth study of the Holocaust, should be used as a follow-up to a basic unit of study on World War II. In this lesson, students will develop an understanding of their personal role and responsibility in preserving freedom. They will participate in whole-group discussions and activities related to personal freedom and will listen to, discuss, and summarize literature based on the realities of the Holocaust.

3. Focus Questions for Students

Social Studies

- If Hitler never killed a single Jew, yet six million Jews were killed during the time he was in power, who is to blame?
- Who is responsible for freedom?
- What can you do to prevent evil?

4. Culminating Assessment

The students will write an initial answer to the question “Who is to blame?” in their journals. After each reading and discussion, students further develop their initial answer. When all the readings and discussions are completed, students can revise their answer and share it with the class as a whole. Teacher observation is all that is necessary in the evaluation of student performance on this lesson.

5. Materials/Equipment/Resources

Included in this lesson:

- “First They Came for the Jews,” by Martin Niemöeller
- “The Hangman,” by Maurice Ogden

Also needed to conduct this lesson:

- *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, by Eve Bunting (New York: Jewish Publication Society 1995)
- *South Carolina Voices: Lessons from the Holocaust* (published by the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Holocaust Commission and distributed to all high schools in the state)
- map of Europe for each student

6. Teacher Preparation

- A. Locate the materials needed to conduct the lesson.
- B. Make a copy of the transparencies 6A (“Concentration Camps and Killing Centers”) and 6B (“Holocaust Deaths”) in *South Carolina Voices: Lessons from the Holocaust*.

7. Procedures

Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Assessments
Introduce the word “catastrophe” to the students by giving several examples that relate to its meaning (“great disaster”). A hurricane is a catastrophe, as is an avalanche. Accept student input.	Offer ideas about other events that are great disasters.	Informal teacher observation during discussion.
Introduce the word “holocaust” and explain that it is similar to “catastrophe” in that it is a great disaster, but it is different in that “holocaust” is usually defined as destruction by fire.	Offer ideas about things that could be considered a holocaust.	Informal teacher observation during discussion.
Use transparencies 6A and 6B (from <i>South Carolina Voices: Lessons from the Holocaust</i>) to explain that during World War II the German government, controlled by the Nazi Party and its leader, Adolf Hitler, killed six million Jews who lived in Europe. This tragic episode is called the Holocaust because, in its massive destruction of human life, it is like what is meant by the Hebrew word <i>olah</i> , “a sacrificial offering that is consumed entirely by flames.”	Using your map of Europe, determine the names of the countries where the concentration camps and killing centers were located, as well as the countries that incurred the most and the fewest Holocaust deaths.	Informal observation during discussion

Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Assessments
<p>Pose the following question to the class: “If Adolf Hitler himself never killed a single Jew and yet six million Jews were killed while he was in power, who is to blame?”</p>	<p>Use think-pair-share: with a partner, brainstorm the answer to the question the teacher has asked and then share your answer with the whole class.</p> <p>Write in your journal about who you think is to blame.</p>	<p>Informal observation during discussion.</p>
<p>Explain that the next few activities will give them more insight and may even change their answers.</p> <p>Read aloud <i>Terrible Things</i>, by Eve Bunting. Discuss the story on the literal level (e.g., what happens to the animals?) and then ask the students why the Terrible Things keep coming back. As the class who they think the animals are if the story is really about what happened during the Holocaust. Ask them who the Terrible Things are.</p>	<p>Listen to the story and participate in the discussion. Then write in your journal about why you think Eve Bunting wrote this story.</p>	<p>Informal teacher observation during discussion</p>
<p>Hand out copies of “The Hangman,” by Maurice Ogden.</p> <p>Discuss vocabulary: “diffident,” “scaffold,” “gallows,” “criminal,” “alien,” “usurer,” “infidel,” and “henchman.”</p>	<p>Participate in an oral reading of the poem. Afterwards, discuss the importance of the riddle in the poem.</p> <p>Write in your journal about why you think Maurice Ogden wrote this poem.</p>	<p>Informal teacher observation during discussion</p>

Teacher Activities	Student Activities	Assessments
Explain to students that they need to listen for the riddle and what it means.		
Hand out copies of “First They Came for the Jews,” by Martin Niemöeller. Explain that he was a Sachsenhausen survivor. Read the poem aloud to the students twice. Then ask them why do they believe Martin Niemöeller wrote this poem.	Listen to the readings of the poem and then discuss why Niemöeller wrote it.	Informal teacher observation during discussion
Have each student return to his or her their original journal entry and then write a revised explanation about who is to blame for the Holocaust.	Revise your original journal entry about who is to blame for the Holocaust. Then share your new entry with the other students and participate in a class discussion of issue.	Informal teacher observation during discussion

8. Differentiation of Instruction

Gifted students can create a list of questions for further independent study on issues related to the Holocaust. For students with limited ability in written expression, the teacher can accept their oral participation in lieu of the written responses.

First They Came for the Jews

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was not one left to speak out for me.

—Martin Niemöeller

The Hangman

1.

Into our town the Hangman came,
Smelling of gold and blood and flame
And he paced our bricks with a diffident air
And built his frame on the courthouse square.

The scaffold stood by the courthouse side,
Only as wide as the door was wide;
A frame as tall, or little more,
Than the capping sill of the courthouse door.

And we wondered, whenever we had the time,
Who the criminal, what the crime,
That hangman judged with the yellow twist
Of knotted hemp in his busy fist.

And innocent though we were, with dread
We passed those eyes of buckshot lead;
Till one cried: "Hangman, who is he
For whom you raise the gallows-tree?"

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye,
And he gave us a riddle instead of reply;
"He who serves me best," said he,
"Shall earn the rope on the gallows-tree."

And he stepped down, and laid his hand
On a man who came from another land
And we breathed again, for another's grief
At the Hangman's hand was our relief.

And the gallows-frame on the courthouse lawn
By tomorrow's sun would be struck and gone.
So we gave him way, and no one spoke,
Out of respect for his hangman's cloak.

2.

The next day's sun looked mildly down
On roof and street in our quiet town
And, stark and black in the morning air,
The gallows-tree on the courthouse square.

And the Hangman stood at this usual stand
With the yellow hemp in his busy hand;
With his buckshot eye and his jaw like a pike
And his air so knowing and businesslike.

And we cried: "Hangman, have you not done,
Yesterday, with the alien one?"
Then we fell silent, and stood amazed:
"Oh, not for him was the gallows raised."

He laughed a laugh as he looked at us:
"Did you think I'd gone to all this fuss
To hang one man? That's a thing I do
To stretch the rope when the rope is new."

Then one cried, "Murderer!" One cried, "Shame!"
And into our midst the Hangman came
To that man's place. "Do you hold," said he,
"With him that was meant for the gallows-tree?"

And he laid his hand on that one's arm,
And we shrank back in quick alarm,
And we gave him way, and no one spoke
Out of fear of his hangman's cloak.

That night we saw with dread surprise
The Hangman's scaffold had grown in size.
Fed by the blood beneath the chute
The gallows-tree had taken root.

Now as wide, or a little more,
Than the steps that led to the courthouse door,
As tall as the writing, or nearly as tall,
Halfway up on the courthouse wall.

3.

The third he took—we had all heard tell—
Was a usurer and infidel,
And: “What,” said the Hangman, “have you to do
With the gallows-bound, and he a Jew?”

And we cried out: “Is this one he
Who has served you well and faithfully?”
The Hangman smiled: “It’s a clever scheme
To try the strength of the gallows-beam.”

The fourth man’s dark, accusing song
Had scratched out comfort hard and long;
And: “What concern,” he gave us back,
“Have you for the doomed—the doomed and black?”

The fifth. The sixth. And we cried again:
“Hangman, Hangman, is this the man?”
“It’s a trick,” he said, “that we hangmen know
For easing the trap when the trap springs slow.”

And so we ceased, and asked not more,
As the Hangman tallied his bloody score;
And sun by sun, and night by night,
The gallows grew to monstrous height.

The wings of the scaffold opened wide
Till they covered the square from side to side;
And the monster cross-beam, looking down,
Cast its shadow across the town.

4.

Then through the town the Hangman came
And called in the empty streets my name—
And I looked at the gallows soaring tall
And thought: “There is no one left at all

For hanging, and so he calls me
To help pull down the gallows-tree.”
And I went out with right good hope
To the Hangman’s tree and the Hangman’s rope.

He smiled at me as I came down
To the courthouse square through the silent town,
And supple and stretched in his busy hand
Was the yellow twist of the hempen strand.

And he whistled his tune as he tried the trap
And it sprang down with a ready snap—
And then with a smile of awful command
He laid his hand upon my hand.

“You tricked me, Hangman!” I shouted then,
“That your scaffold was built for other men.
And I no henchman of yours,” I cried,
“You lied to me, Hangman, foully lied!”

Then a twinkle grew in his buckshot eye:
“Lied to you? Tricked you?” he said, “Not I.
For I answered straight and I told you true:
The scaffold was raised for none but you.”

“For who has served me more faithfully
Than you with your coward’s hope?” said he,
“And where are the others that might have stood
Side by your side in the common good?”

“Dead,” I whispered; and amiably
“Murdered,” the Hangman corrected me:
“First the alien, then the Jew . . .
I did no more than you let me do.”

Beneath the beam that blocked the sky,
None had stood so alone as I—
And the Hangman strapped me, and no voice there
Cried “Stay!” for me in the empty square.

—Maurice Ogden